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Chairperson: Mr. Flisiuk (Vice-Chairperson) ..... (Poland)

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In the absence of Mr. Chipaziwa (Zimbabwe), Mr. Flisiuk (Poland), Vice-Chairperson, took the Chair.

The meeting was called to order at 3.10 p.m.

Agenda item 51: United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (A/65/13, A/65/225, A/65/283 and A/65/311)

1. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA)), reviewing some of the more recent developments relating to the work of UNRWA, said that in Gaza the Agency continued to deal with the aftermath of destruction and human suffering engendered by the recent war. It welcomed the positive measures taken by Israel to improve access for a variety of consumer goods and some construction materials for a number of internationally supervised projects. However, the overall situation of the civilian population continued to be extremely difficult.

2. Restoring normal economic conditions and addressing the infrastructure needs were the key challenges. In spite of the enormous requirements for rehabilitation and construction, crucial materials remained subject to severe restrictions, cumbersome import procedures and frequent delays. On the broader issue of economic recovery, little progress had occurred so far, though it was encouraging that discussions were ongoing in that respect. The United Nations, including UNRWA, recognized Israel's legitimate security needs and noted the continuing engagement of the Israeli authorities. However, he wished to join the Secretary-General and other international actors in urging a further increase in the range and quantity of goods actually imported into Gaza and the establishment of measures aimed at enabling normal trade to resume. At the same time, UNRWA called for the blockade to be lifted in full to enable Gaza to begin the process of recovery that its long-suffering people so urgently needed. Efforts made so far were important and must continue. But the root causes of the blockade must also be addressed, because logistical measures taken in isolation from their wider context would inevitably be insufficient to address needs of civilians in Gaza. Without a full opening of the borders for people and goods — both imports and exports — dependency on aid would continue to remain abnormally high for a population with skills, entrepreneurial spirit and the desire to provide for themselves.

3. In the West Bank, there were welcome signs of economic recovery that was driven, at least in part, by growth in the main urban areas. It was essential to note, however, that improved macroeconomic indicators had yet to transform living standards for the majority of refugees and had not alleviated the deficit of human rights that was inherent in a life under occupation. Many Palestinians — refugees and non-refugees alike — continued to endure the harsh effects of the regime of fragmentation and closures that were becoming permanent features of that part of the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Of special concern was the plight of refugees living under the shadow of the barrier and of rural communities that experienced shocking restrictions on access to work, land and services. He called attention to the special situation of refugees residing in East Jerusalem, a population approximately 70,000 strong, whose lives and livelihoods were particularly exposed to severe risks from house demolitions and forced evictions.

4. In just a few weeks, UNRWA would join the rest of the United Nations family in appealing for emergency humanitarian assistance in the Occupied Palestinian Territory through a consolidated funding appeal. It was a sad reflection of the lack of progress on the political front that UNRWA was compelled to do so for the ninth time since the year 2000. Resources spent on food aid, cash grants and emergency jobs should be used to promote the institutional, human and economic development of Palestinians. He was concerned by the decreasing response to appeals for humanitarian funding in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and trusted that adequate resources would continue to be provided for those urgent needs as long as was necessary.

5. In Lebanon, UNRWA had been greatly encouraged by the courageous decision of Parliament in August 2009 to amend labour laws and grant Palestinians access to formal employment in the private sector. That represented an important first step which would contribute to the ability of refugees to lift themselves out of poverty, without prejudice to other refugee rights and United Nations resolutions. Thus, as he had pointed out in recent meetings with the Lebanese authorities, the full implementation of those amendments was urgent and crucial.

6. In northern Lebanon, the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared Camp continued. Approximately 27,000 refugees had fled from the camp in June 2007 and, regrettably, they were still displaced and living in hardship. UNRWA was working with Lebanese civilian and military institutions to expedite rebuilding and to ease access for refugees to the camp and surrounding communities, with due regard for Lebanon's security concerns. In that regard, UNRWA was pleased to report that it would soon be possible for a group of refugees to return to the first reconstructed area of the camp, with the rest of the displaced population to be gradually rehoused in seven subsequent phases of reconstruction. Five of those next phases required urgent funding to be implemented — an issue that he would like brought to the attention of the donors that had pledged support to the project at the conference held in Vienna in 2008.

7. In Jordan and the Syrian Arab Republic, the situation of the refugees during the reporting period and over the course of the year had been, by contrast, stable and conducive to a focus on human development programming, thanks also to the invaluable support of host Governments. Financial challenges and the need to continue the reform process were, however, common to all fields of operation.

8. The precarious financial situation of the core budget of UNRWA had been of serious concern throughout 2009 and 2010 and would remain a grave issue for the immediate future. As late as August, UNRWA had been confronted by an $85 million shortfall against the $541.5 million operational budget — a shortfall which had threatened to prevent UNRWA from maintaining existing services as of October. In recent weeks, however, UNRWA had been informed of exceptional additional contributions by its three largest donors, notably, the European Union, the United States and the United Kingdom. That assistance, in addition to increased contributions by other donors, had substantially helped to narrow the funding gap to approximately $30 million. With some anticipated additional resources expected to be made available both from traditional and non-traditional donors, and the prudent utilization of resources, it was hoped that the remaining gap for 2010 would be bridged. All help was greatly appreciated, especially at a time when States' budgets were under enormous pressure.

9. As it would be facing even greater challenges in the years ahead, UNRWA must work with its Advisory Commission and the General Assembly to find ways to tackle the structural roots of the Agency's recurrent financial crises. Budget shortfalls of such magnitude threatened the continuation of quality services to refugees, prevented sound planning, placed at risk the groundbreaking reforms of recent years and were at odds with the support Member States had expressed for UNRWA, its mission and the refugees it served. The Agency was doing its part to help address the root causes of its financial difficulties. He had made it a priority to revise the strategy for resource mobilization. UNRWA had also undertaken an enhanced fund-raising campaign, while ensuring in parallel that internal financial and operations management remained on a footing of austerity and stringent fiscal prudence.

10. While continuing to count on its core donors, UNRWA was extending its appeals to Member States in Asia, Africa and Latin America and redoubling outreach to partners in the Arab world. It was also actively seeking new partnerships with foundations and the private sector, with a view to tapping not only into resources but also the technical expertise, management support and networks that could help strengthen the Agency's advocacy for Palestine refugees and broaden its global visibility. Recalling a decision which the General Assembly had taken 40 years ago, in response to an earlier financial crisis, to provide for international staff salary costs from the Organization's assessed contributions budget, he said that UNRWA was currently at a similar juncture in that additional assistance was required from the regular budget to help cover new and increased management-related expenditure and enable donors' voluntary contributions to be devoted to direct service delivery for refugees. He thus joined the Secretary-General in the suggestion that the General Assembly might look again at the adequacy of the level and scope of its current funding for UNRWA.

11. As previously reported, UNRWA had set in motion an important process of institutional transformation through the organizational development plan started in 2006. Most related initiatives had been completed on time and on budget at the end of 2009. That comprehensive effort had laid the foundation for the introduction of modern management systems and vital improvements in the quality and effectiveness of services provided to refugees. The effort had entailed close consultation with donors and hosts in the region — in particular through the Advisory Commission — and

engagement with United Nations Headquarters in New York, where delegations had been kept informed throughout the process.

12. Organizational development represented a first step towards improving the Agency's work. The momentum of reforms would be maintained through a range of initiatives under the heading of "sustaining change". The current phase of reforms was being led by the Deputy Commissioner-General, Margot Ellis, who had taken up her post early in 2010. Under her able leadership, the "sustaining change" package of initiatives was concentrating on enhancing service delivery to refugees and on improving the Agency's approach to resource mobilization and strategic partnerships. The Agency was scrutinizing in detail the structures and methods of the education, health and social safety-net programmes. Based on the outcomes of independent expert reviews, UNRWA was identifying areas where rigorous modernizing changes would be introduced to ensure that refugees were better served. In tandem with the medium-term strategy for 2010-2015, the continuation of reforms into the near future would therefore gradually help bring the process of management and programme development to fruition.

13. The Agency was committed to sustaining the achievements built up over six decades, including contributing to the growth of a skilled Palestinian middle class. It was determined to overcome the constraints that stood in the way of its fulfilling its dynamic role as the largest investor in the substantial human capital that Palestine refugees represented. The Agency saw its core mission as that of helping refugees realize their potential in spite of the constraints of protracted exile. That goal remained at the core of what "human development" meant to UNRWA and was exemplified particularly by the attention the Agency gave to refugee children through primary education. Improving education was at the heart of the current reforms. The Agency sought to nurture students in directions consistent with United Nations values such as tolerance for diversity and opposing views, peaceful resolution of disputes and respect for human rights with dignity for all.

14. The protection work carried out by UNRWA was a good example of its deploying every available programmatic, normative and advocacy tool to safeguard and advance the rights of Palestine refugees. UNRWA was achieving its protection goals by embracing more explicitly the duty of care it owed to refugees in four major dimensions, namely, in planning and implementing programmes, in the actual delivery of services, in monitoring and interventions to promote respect for aspects of international law and in advocacy for a just and durable solution for the refugees. The work of UNRWA could only speak to a portion of refugee concerns and expectations, many of which were the responsibility of States and international political actors to address. However, its role required it to encourage concerned parties to respect and implement their human rights and international law obligations towards Palestine refugees and to remind political actors that they and they alone could and must solve the refugee question in a principled manner.

15. UNRWA invited the international community to recognize Palestine refugees as a sizeable constituency for peace that represented a significant body of interests in the future of the Middle East. He expressed the profound gratitude of UNRWA to the States whose financial contributions sustained its work with refugees and to the host authorities for their substantial and diverse contributions in hosting refugees. After extending heartfelt thanks to the staff of UNRWA, who were the unsung heroes of the Agency's long history, he noted with regret that the Agency's area staff were the only United Nations employees who did not receive compensation for the life-threatening risks they encountered in conflict areas and renewed the Agency's appeal to the General Assembly to remedy that anomaly.

16. **Mr. Chabi** (Morocco) asked if the Commissioner-General could give some idea of how he planned to reshuffle the resource mobilization strategy to deal with the endemic financial difficulties of UNRWA; and also an indication of the level of funding received to date as a result of the $4.5 million pledged at the Sharm el-Sheikh donors' meeting.

17. **Mr. Mansour** (Observer for Palestine) commenting on the inhumane conditions of the 1.5 million Palestine refugees in Gaza and of the 30,000 Palestinians displaced from the Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon, as well as the remarkable support UNRWA was providing to all the refugees, asked for more information on what exactly Israel had done since the summer to loosen its immoral and illegal blockade of Gaza, if still only 24 per cent of the approved goods were allowed in. Especially urgent were materials for the reconstruction of the schools.

18. Also, he wondered what it would take to make a real impact on the recurrent cycle of underfunding, which added fear of the possible loss of the Agency's essential services to the pain of the daily living conditions of the Palestine refugees; and how Member States could collectively deal with the ongoing financial problems experienced by UNRWA.

19. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that in a month the Agency would present its resource mobilization strategy in the broader context of the next phase of its reform process. Among the recommendations were that UNRWA must: impress upon donors that its core budget was not an administrative black hole but the key to running its educational programmes and thus should be seen as an investment in the future of the Palestine refugees; exploit all funding opportunities; enlarge its donor base for the core budget, to which only a small number currently contributed — a point to which he had drawn attention in Cairo at a meeting of Arab League ministers whose countries gave welcome support to specific projects and emergency appeals but not to the core budget; expand its partnerships with non-State actors such as foundations and other institutions in the private sector; and continue to be cost-effective in conducting its programmes through better planning, implementation and oversight.

20. The Sharm el-Sheikh pledges to which Morocco had referred had been made only to alleviate the situation in the Gaza Strip, not to assist Palestine refugees elsewhere. Although the pledges had not been made directly to UNRWA, he could say that most had not been implemented because of the slow pace of the Gaza reconstruction.

21. Regarding Israeli measures to allow more goods into Gaza, he said that improvement had been considerable since June. A number of building materials were no longer forbidden, although restrictions still applied and laborious application procedures were required for all approved materials. Also, a much greater range of consumer goods was available. UNRWA had made two requests to Israel: that it establish transparent and accelerated bureaucratic procedures; and that it facilitate the passage of more goods across the two crossings that were open. Israel was in fact studying the possibility of modifying the arrangements by, for example, keeping the crossing points open for more days. Unfortunately, the reconstruction needs in Gaza were so huge — in such areas as health, education and water — that the crumbling of the infrastructure was outstripping improvements, even though other United Nations agencies were also working on the problem.

22. The United Nations was considering the Agency's appeal that the regular budget should be used to fund mandated system-wide management-related expenditures in areas such as security or the environment, because they were prohibitive for an agency that subsisted on voluntary contributions.

23. **Mr. Nyowani** (Zimbabwe) said it was evident that the United Nations should provide predictable funding for UNRWA and all its projects. Zimbabwe supported the Commissioner-General's request for more funding from the regular budget of the United Nations.

24. **Mr. Elsherbini** (Egypt) asked if the Commissioner-General could elaborate on the reconstruction efforts under way in Gaza and the difficulties in bringing in construction materials, especially for schools. The recent remarks by a representative of UNRWA suggesting that Palestine refugees should abandon any hope of being granted the right of return deserved to be rejected. The Agency had no political mandate and the remarks were completely inappropriate.

25. **Mr. Ramadan** (Lebanon) said that the issue of the Palestine refugees was not just humanitarian but also political. The main goal was their right to return to their lands. UNRWA representatives had no right to express political opinions about the right of return, which could be negotiated only in the context of the final-status talks.

26. The Israeli blockade of Gaza, in violation of international law and of the Agency's right to full freedom of movement, was still in effect, and was intended as a means of subjugation. Israel was greatly delaying the entry of goods in general, making the Agency pay illegal taxes on all goods allowed in, and prohibiting the import even of innocuous foodstuffs.

27. Lebanon supported the appeal for more donor support and the call for assessed contributions to UNRWA. It regarded the liberalization of its labour laws in favour of its Palestine refugees as only a first step, and believed that other States should follow suit.

28. **Mr. Windsor** (Australia), after noting with satisfaction the additional donations to the Agency's core budget, asked about the status of its working capital reserve. He would also like clarification about the standard compensation for risk, how that issue could be best addressed, and more information on the management-related expenses to which the Commissioner-General had alluded and on the problems encountered in reopening the schools and providing educational services.

29. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General, United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that it was part of the reconstruction plan to rebuild Agency facilities damaged or destroyed in Gaza, as well as schools, health centres, warehouses and private homes. UNRWA had presented, together with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), a joint $250 million plan for meeting the needs in terms of repairs and expansion as well as reconstruction, and it would serve as the basis for gradual negotiations with the Israeli authorities. With regard to educational services, there were 200,000 refugee children in Gaza and the number was growing by 8,000 each year. UNRWA was unable to accommodate that growth and had therefore told Israel that it was urgent to build about 100 new schools and that the current pace was too slow. Shortfalls in the core fund also made it impossible to provide enough teachers or training and information technology facilities. In the end, the blockade must be lifted entirely to allow reconstruction to proceed normally. The Gazans were paying the price for the political and security considerations at issue.

30. He wished to assure the Committee that UNRWA had immediately distanced itself from the unfortunate, inappropriate statement made by one particular staff member, which did not reflect the Agency's position and had been made out of context. Clearly, UNRWA had no mandate to deal with political questions.

31. In answer to the representative of Australia, one of the most generous donors to UNRWA, he said that the Agency's working capital reserve had been completely depleted, having gone from $60 million in 2005 to nothing in 2010. That reserve must be reconstituted as a safety net; otherwise, the Agency would not be able to pay staff salaries as of January 2011. He therefore asked all donors to make early as well as generous contributions to UNRWA. Also, the United Nations normally paid what was known as a hazard allowance to staff members working in dangerous circumstances, but UNRWA, with 30,000 local staff, could not afford to pay them all that was due to them, hence the appeal for funding from the regular budget.

32. **Mr. Belkheir** (Libyan Arab Jamahiriya), expressing sincere thanks to the Commissioner-General and his staff for their work, said that he would welcome more details about the protection needs and salary rates of UNRWA staff and what Member States could do to assist. He also wished to know whether there was coordination between the Agency and Israel regarding entry of goods into Gaza.

33. **Mr. Grandi** (Commissioner-General of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East) said that he wished to thank the Government of the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya for its contributions to reconstruction projects in the Gaza Strip. As for the question of UNRWA staff, the Agency had 133 international posts but as many as 30,000 so-called "area staff", a category that was peculiar to the Agency. The area staff were teachers, doctors and social workers, among others, whose salaries were determined by comparing the rates paid to their counterparts in the host countries. It was impossible, and would not be appropriate, to pay such a large number of persons as international staff, but they were United Nations staff and should therefore enjoy the relevant immunities and privileges. As for coordination regarding the entry of goods, he took it that the question referred to freight transported by ship. The Agency imported all materials by legal means. In one case, it had been asked to participate in the logistics of offloading cargo at a port and had done so.

34. **Ms. Abdelhady-Nasser** (Observer for Palestine) expressed gratitude to the entire staff of UNRWA for their exemplary service on behalf of the Palestine refugees. The Agency had done much not only to ameliorate the plight of the Palestine refugees but also to serve as a stabilizing force in the region. In that connection, the host countries, Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, together with the donor States, deserved recognition and gratitude for supporting the Palestine refugees and the Agency. Strong international support should continue to be provided to UNRWA.

35. It was a tragedy and a grave injustice that no just, comprehensive and lasting solution had been found for

the Palestine refugees, who had the right under international law to return to their homes to live in peace with their neighbours and to receive compensation for their losses and suffering. In that regard, she reiterated her rejection of Israel's constant denial of the rights of Palestine refugees and of any responsibility for their plight. Israel had consistently obstructed their return, violated their rights and ignored, with impunity, the relevant international resolutions and laws, thereby gravely compounding what was already a humanitarian catastrophe.

36. Refugees faced particularly distressing conditions in the camps in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, where they were subjected by Israel to human rights violations, the use of collective punishment and affronts to their human dignity. The situation in the Gaza Strip likewise remained critical, with the maintenance of a merciless blockade and the severe consequences of Israel's military aggression affecting every area of life. Moreover, Israel's continued obstruction of recovery, rehabilitation and reconstruction in Gaza threatened to do irrevocable harm to the well-being and stability of the society as a whole.

37. It was deplorable that the population of Gaza was forced to live amidst the rubble of buildings and facilities destroyed by Israeli forces. Steps should be taken to hold Israel to account for perpetrating war crimes in Gaza, and justice should be delivered to the victims. The persistence of the abhorrent situation in the Gaza Strip intensified feelings of injustice and despair, prompting Volunteers from around the world to try to bring in much-needed humanitarian assistance. In that connection, she called for Israel to be held to account for the civilian deaths caused during the attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla in May 2010.

38. In the Gaza Strip, the civilian population faced high rates of food insecurity and unemployment, and the number of families living in abject poverty continued to rise. Damage to health and sanitation networks posed major environmental and health risks, and the education system was severely overburdened. As a result of the classroom shortage, coupled with Israel's refusal to allow in construction materials for UNRWA schools, as many as 40,000 Palestinian children had been turned away during the new school year. In the light of international efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, such a situation was totally deplorable and must be redressed.

39. Noting that there had been an almost total ban on the importation of construction materials into Gaza over the previous year, she called on the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel to lift the blockade completely, as that step was essential for socio-economic recovery and reconstruction. Israeli policies hampered both refugee access to UNRWA services in the West Bank, including in East Jerusalem, and the mobility of Agency staff members, who were sometimes subjected to intimidation and even physical harm, especially at checkpoints. Palestine refugees in East Jerusalem and in areas between the separation wall and the 1967 border were the ones who had been most affected by Israeli illegal practices, suffering the trauma of ongoing dispossession and repeated displacement.

40. Turning to the financial crisis of the Agency and the operational constraints imposed on it by Israel, she reiterated the need to respect the Agency's immunity and ensure the safety and security of its staff and facilities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. Member States must firmly insist on Israel's compliance with its legal obligations in that regard.

41. She thanked UNRWA for its extraordinary efforts in the Gaza Strip during the reporting period, including the organization of the Gaza Summer Games for children, notwithstanding the damage inflicted on the summer games facilities earlier in 2010, and reaffirmed her full support for the initiative, which could make all the difference in the life of a traumatized child. The Agency's programmes for, among others, youth, women and special needs students, and its participation in projects in refugee camps in Lebanon, including the reconstruction of the Nahr el-Bared camp, were most commendable, as were the efforts made by the Government of Lebanon to strengthen refugees' rights and extend refugee services.

42. In conclusion, she urged the international community to intensify efforts to promote a peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine, including an end to the Israeli occupation, the establishment of an independent State of Palestine, with East Jerusalem as its capital, and a just solution to the plight of the Palestine refugees on the basis of General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

43. **Ms. Gendi** (Egypt), speaking on behalf of the Movement of Non-Aligned Countries, stressed the essential role that UNRWA played in serving more than

4.8 million Palestine refugees, ameliorating their plight through the provision of education, health, relief and social services, in addition to its work in the areas of camp infrastructure, microfinance and emergency assistance. That role was essential until the Palestine refugees realized their inalienable rights, including their right to return and to fair compensation, pursuant to General Assembly resolution 194 (III) of 1948.

44. In that context, the Movement was concerned about Israel's persistence in denying the Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, their basic rights and in increasing their suffering throughout the more than 43 years of its occupation and its systematic violations of international humanitarian law, human rights law and the relevant United Nations resolutions. Regrettably, Israel's illegal practices included the targeting of UNRWA staff, thereby obstructing their activities and the mandate given by the General Assembly. The Movement was gravely concerned about the extremely difficult living conditions experienced by Palestine refugees in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, including East Jerusalem, particularly in refugee camps in Gaza, as a result of the continuing collective punitive measures and the blockade imposed by Israel and of its military aggression, which had caused the death of and injury to thousands of Palestinians and widespread damage and destruction to the Palestinian civilian infrastructure and United Nations facilities.

45. The ban on the entry of construction materials into Gaza had halted practically all reconstruction projects, including schools and medical centres, with the resulting damaging effects on Palestinian children, whose right to education, among other human rights, was being seriously and systematically violated. Israel had a legal obligation under the Fourth Geneva Convention to open its crossing points with Gaza in order to allow the reconstruction and building of schools. In the West Bank, including East Jerusalem, Israel's tight regime of closures, roadblocks, house demolitions, land confiscation, settlement expansion, settlers' violence against Palestinians, curfews and military operations continued to have a devastating effect on the Palestinian population and on the Agency's activities. The Movement called for the international community to bear its responsibilities and ensure that all those illegal actions were halted immediately.

46. The Movement was alarmed by the extensive damage and destruction of the Agency's facilities caused during the Israeli military assault on Gaza. In that regard, it condemned Israel's breach of the inviolability of United Nations premises and its failure to accord the assets of the Organization immunity from any form of interference. The Movement reiterated its call on Israel to end its collective punitive measures and illegal blockade imposed on the civilian population in the Gaza Strip, including by the sustained and permanent opening of its Gaza border crossings in full compliance with the terms and provisions of Security Council resolution 1860, General Assembly resolution ES-18 and other relevant United Nations resolutions. It also called on Israel to cease its obstruction of construction materials and supplies for the repair and reconstruction of damaged and destroyed Agency facilities and for the implementation of suspended civilian infrastructure projects in refugee camps in Gaza.

47. The Movement acknowledged that the ability of UNRWA to realize its objectives was affected by the policies of donor countries and the changes taking place within the refugee population itself. It was the Movement's firm belief that serious consideration should be given to ways of increasing contributions to the Agency to ease the ongoing financial shortfalls exacerbated by the situation on the ground. Meanwhile, the Movement stood ready to consider other options for dealing with the very serious problem of the Agency's underfunded budget. It also supported the request by UNRWA to increase its staff to allow it to undertake fully its responsibilities and to respond immediately to the increasing challenges on the ground.

48. **Mr. Lambert** (Belgium), speaking on behalf of the European Union; the candidate countries Croatia, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Turkey; the stabilization and association process countries Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro and Serbia; and, in addition, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, said that the European Union fully supported the extension of the mandate of UNRWA and saluted its commitment to its invaluable work. Since his appointment as Commissioner-General, Mr. Grandi, with the support of the Advisory Commission, had continued to steer the Agency further along the path of reform to ensure that it would be able to face the challenges of the future. The European Union also expressed its

appreciation to the authorities of Jordan, Lebanon and the Syrian Arab Republic, which had consistently facilitated the Agency's work and continued to improve their assistance to Palestine refugees.

49. The European Union commended the commitment of the Agency's staff and management who, often in difficult or dangerous conditions, provided essential services to Palestine refugees. The Agency's activities in the areas of education, health, relief and social services, microfinance, infrastructure and camp improvement were all crucial to the well-being of the refugee population. In particular, the Gaza summer games constituted a highly appreciated and important event which could count on the continued support of the European Union.

50. The European Union welcomed the planned reforms in the Agency's education programmes. It appreciated the importance of the Agency's activities in the field of education, helping refugee children to acquire essential knowledge and skills and, crucially, to develop tolerance and understanding of their rights and those of others. Urgent measures needed to be taken to address the fact that more than 39,000 children in Gaza were being denied access to a United Nations education.

51. The situation on the ground continued to hamper the capability of humanitarian agencies, including UNRWA, to provide essential services to the Palestine refugee population. While the European Union welcomed Israel's steps to ease the entry of goods into Gaza, it reiterated its call for a full implementation of Security Council resolution 1860 (2009) and for the immediate, sustained and unconditional opening of crossings for the flow of humanitarian aid and commercial goods, the movement of people to and from Gaza and the transport of goods to and from the West Bank. The 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access must be fully implemented. The reconstruction and maintenance of needed educational and health-care facilities, as well as facilities for sewage treatment and power generation, required a steady and predictable supply of construction materials and equipment that was not yet being provided. Limitations on the freedom of movement of UNRWA staff had impeded the Agency's ability to fulfil its tasks and needed to be addressed.

52. The European Union continued to call for a complete stop to all violence and arms smuggling into Gaza. Threats and attacks against UNRWA facilities and staff, as witnessed in the Gaza Strip earlier that year, were deeply troubling. All parties should ensure full and secure access for all humanitarian personnel and goods, as required by the principles and practices of international humanitarian law and reiterated by the road map.

53. The European Union and its member States remained the Agency's largest donor and regularly made large contributions to the special programmes and emergency appeals. It had also made additional efforts to alleviate the acute funding shortfalls at the end of 2009 and in 2010. Nonetheless, the Agency was faced with an alarming financial situation that brought with it a series of austerity measures that would impact the quality of services provided. It needed predictable and adequate funding, which the European Union firmly believed was the shared responsibility of the international community; the fact that 90 per cent of the Agency's resources was still provided by only 15 donors was not sustainable. The European Union therefore strongly urged new donors to commit financially to the work of UNRWA and for existing donors to increase their contributions.

54. The reform process reflected in the Agency's medium-term strategy for 2010-2015, would undoubtedly improve the quality of the services it provided. The European Union urged the Agency to apply maximum efficiency procedures, reduce operational and administrative costs and maximize the use of resources, and it strongly supported the ambitious effort to revitalize the Agency. Reforms would strengthen the confidence of both donors and refugees.

55. The European Union called on all parties to seek a satisfactory way to keep the peace negotiations alive and moving forward and then to cover all final-status issues, respecting previous agreements and understandings. Those negotiations should lead, within an agreed timeframe, to a two-State solution under which the State of Israel and an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable State of Palestine would live side by side in peace and security.

56. **Mr. Redwan** (Saudi Arabia) thanked all UNRWA staff for the sacrifices that they made in carrying out their work and expressed the hope that the Agency would be supplied with the necessary resources to continue to deliver its programmes and services for

Palestine refugees. The Agency needed more staff and facilities to deal with demographic growth among the refugee population, and the international community, in particular donor States and organizations, should increase their funding for those programmes and help resolve the financial difficulties adversely affecting the UNRWA budget.

57. His Government strongly condemned the blockade imposed on the Gaza Strip and demanded an immediate end to it and to all the arbitrary measures and restrictions imposed by Israel on international aid agencies. It furthermore demanded that the separation wall, which had been built illegally in the Occupied Palestinian Territory, should be demolished and that Israel should pay compensation for the damage it had done to UNRWA property and buildings.

58. Saudi Arabia's commitment to humanitarian issues was evidenced by its generous donations to humanitarian aid agencies and steadfast support for UNRWA, to which it had contributed a total of $743.8 million for budgeting purposes from 2002 to 2009, in addition to $200 million through the Al-Aqsa Fund. It had contributed a further $25 million for the reconstruction of Nahr el-Bared refugee camp in Lebanon. Saudi Arabia would continue to pay annual contributions to the Agency until the Palestine refugees returned to their land and regained their rights in accordance with General Assembly resolution 194 (III). Financial support alone, though vital, was not sufficient: political support, especially from the international community, was crucial to resolving the Palestinian issue and establishing a just and comprehensive peace based on the relevant United Nations resolutions.

59. **Ms. Smith** (Norway) said that despite the extraordinary contributions that had narrowed the gap the Agency's financial deficit of 20 per cent of the General Fund was expected to increase in 2011. The fundamental structural challenge facing UNRWA was the fact that the refugee population was growing annually by 2.4 per cent and would continue to do so in the foreseeable future. To meet that challenge, UNRWA must change in three ways: how it was funded, how it operated and how it cooperated with other stakeholders and partners. On the first point, an immediate step would be for all members of the Advisory Commission, which were committed to providing financial support, to share the burden more equitably and increase their contributions. In the long term, the donor base must be expanded. Secondly, in the Agency's second critical phase of reform, everything must be done to cut costs and streamline programmes while maintaining their quality. Thirdly, UNRWA must look for synergies and work more closely with other United Nations agencies and humanitarian and development organizations, while also seeking opportunities for cooperation with the Palestinian Authority and the host countries.

60. The overall purpose of international engagement in the Middle East was to lay the groundwork for enduring peace, end the conflict and build a Palestinian State. A huge international effort went into that endeavour. The total amount of aid provided to the Palestinians was $5 billion a year. Some 80 countries had bilateral development programmes; a plethora of non-governmental organizations were engaged in activities on the ground; and the United Nations had 21 agencies and specialized programmes established in the Occupied Palestinian Territory. In working towards the common goal, the donors had a particular responsibility to oversee the collective effort and ensure that contributions were spent as efficiently as possible. The part UNRWA played in the State-building process — the provision of essential services, human development, the protection of the rights of the Palestine refugees under international law while they awaited a negotiated political solution — was a cornerstone of that collective effort.

61. **Mr. Windsor** (Australia) commended UNRWA and its staff for their ongoing commitment and dedicated work over the past year in providing much-needed support to Palestine refugees. He welcomed the Agency's continued emphasis on fiscal responsibility and organizational development and its efforts to further expand the donor base. He also recognized the often substantial in-kind contributions made by the host countries.

62. Australia had been a long-standing supporter of the Agency and had provided more than $88 million since 2001. It would increase its core funding to the Agency in the 2010/11 financial year and would move towards a multi-year agreement with the Agency. In addition to calling for reform, donors also needed to make funding commitments.

63. Australia had been a consistent supporter of the two-State solution and had strongly welcomed the decision to resume direct peace negotiations. Israel's subsequent decision not to extend its moratorium on

settlement activity had been very disappointing. Nevertheless, he urged both parties to resume direct talks and to refrain from any actions that undermined trust or the climate for negotiations.

64. Australia had significantly increased its assistance to the Palestinian people and was contributing to the development of Palestinian institutions and capacity-building in preparation for statehood. It welcomed Israel's easing of access for goods entering Gaza, and continued to urge Israel to do all it could to increase the flow of humanitarian goods and necessary supplies into Gaza. It condemned the cowardly and shameful attacks against the Agency's summer camps for children and the acts of vandalism, as well as all actions that endangered lives in Israel. The day-to-day life and prospects for the Palestine refugees across the region could only be improved through a comprehensive, just and sustainable peace in the Middle East based on a two-State solution.

65. **Mr. Pham** Vinh Quang (Viet Nam) said that UNRWA had continued to prove its excellence in discharging its mandate over the past year. Viet Nam appreciated the extensive reforms that had been implemented, which had led to improved recruitment practices, a new contractual modality and innovative programmes aimed at improving the quality of its service, and it encouraged UNRWA to reform its budget and financial management. It urged the United Nations to provide stronger support for the Agency's work.

66. Funding shortfalls were severely affecting the Agency's operation, and it was vital for the international community to reaffirm its shared commitment to the well-being and development of Palestine refugees. For its part, Viet Nam had contributed $200,000 to the Agency's flash appeal for Gaza in 2009.

67. It was of great concern that the blockade of Gaza had entered its fourth year, and was affecting every aspect of life for 1.5 million people, more than half of whom were children. Eighty per cent of the population was now dependent on food assistance from the United Nations and the persistence of conflict had led to further loss of life and injuries. The separation barrier and other restrictions on movement had led to further hardships for the people, hindered economic and social development, and hampered the ability of UNRWA to carry out its tasks. Viet Nam therefore called upon Israel to cease all military activities and end its blockade. Staff members of UNRWA must have convenient and safe conditions in which to carry out their work, and the privileges and immunities of the Agency as an organ of the United Nations must be fully respected.

68. Viet Nam called on the leaders of Palestine and Israel to resume direct peace talks as soon as possible. The road map, the Arab Peace Initiative, the Madrid terms of reference and the relevant Security Council resolutions remained the best possible framework for the realization of peace in the Middle East through a two-State solution.

69. **Mr. Chabi** (Morocco) said that the report underscored the difficulties that confronted UNRWA as it discharged its humanitarian mission and played a critical role in stabilizing the region until the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was resolved. A major concern was the fact that thousands of children in Gaza had not been attending school for the past three years, and that the schools themselves were functioning on a double-shift basis owing to the lack of authorization and building materials to construct the necessary new schools. That denial of the basic right to education must be remedied.

70. The situation in Gaza, which had barely improved in over six decades, had deteriorated sharply since the imposition of the blockade. A population already coping with poorly functioning essential systems now faced added physical and psychological difficulties, a moribund economy, an unprecedented 43 per cent rate of unemployment and an 80 per cent dependence on United Nations food aid. The Agency's task could not be more complex. Morocco called for the lifting of that unjustifiable blockade of Gaza, and for giving UNRWA the means it needed to carry out its humanitarian mandate. The UNRWA annual budget was clearly insufficient to meet the basic needs of the Palestine refugees living in 58 camps over four countries, and a whole generation of Palestinians were being deprived of their most basic rights. He urged the donor countries to make an additional effort to assist the Agency.

71. The situation in East Jerusalem was disquieting. Israel's lifting of the moratorium on settlement construction and the continuing expulsion of Palestinian families, with takeover of their homes by Israeli settlers, were intolerable and were changing the demographic composition of the Holy City. His

Government's concern had been largely shared by the international community at a recent United Nations meeting on the question of Palestine held in Rabat, which had emphasized that the status of Jerusalem was a key priority for peace in the Middle East, demanded the cessation of Israeli settlement construction and discrimination against the Palestinian residents in Jerusalem, and called for the reopening of Palestinian institutions in East Jerusalem in accordance with the road map.

72. There could be no lasting peace without justice. There was currently international consensus on the two-State solution, the establishment of peace pursuant to the decisions of international legality and the Arab peace initiative. International pressure must be brought to bear to relaunch serious negotiations on that basis.

73. **Mr. Hamed** (Syrian Arab Republic), recalling that the Palestine refugees had not only been forcibly evicted from their land but had also been subjected to grave violations of their basic human rights, expressed astonishment at a statement made by the Director of the New York Liaison Office of UNRWA, Mr. Andrew Whitley, concerning the refugees' right of return. He called on UNRWA officials to provide clarifications in order to prevent any confusion regarding the Agency's activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territory and host countries, which were carried out in accordance with General Assembly resolution 302 (IV).

74. He condemned the maintenance of the Israeli blockade on Gaza, which was holding up crucial programmes and causing humanitarian suffering on a wide scale, and expressed concern at the illegal Israeli practices in the occupied West Bank that severely restricted access to land, services and resources, denying the Palestinian people inter alia freedom of movement and property rights. The restrictions imposed on the movements of the Agency's staff were in contravention of international law and contrasted starkly with the situation in host countries, where no such restrictions were imposed. The damage done by Israel to UNRWA facilities during the attack on Gaza in 2008 could not be justified; Israel must be held responsible for it and for the civilian deaths which it had caused.

75. Palestine refugees in the Syrian Arab Republic had access to a full range of services and employment opportunities and were afforded the same legal protection as Syrian citizens. The Syrian Arab Republic, which hosted more than 500,000 Palestine refugees, provided all possible support to UNRWA to guarantee the refugees a decent life. The Government had contributed $221 million for the refugees in 2009 and had set up a committee to mobilize funding to support the refugees' needs.

76. The international community bore political, moral and legal responsibility for addressing the question of Palestine. Pending a solution, he urged all States to continue supporting UNRWA, to honour funding pledges and to take steps to address the budget shortfall. Affirming that Israel had proved by its actions that it was not ready for peace, he said that the time had come for the international community to bring pressure to bear on Israel to put an end to the occupation of Arab territory and to comply with international resolutions, including General Assembly resolution 194 (III).

77. **Mr. Mohamed** (Sudan), expressing gratitude to UNRWA for doing outstanding work in a very difficult situation, called for Israel's complete withdrawal from the Occupied Palestinian Territory and a just resolution of the Palestinian issue which would allow the Palestine refugees to return to their homes and receive compensation for the losses that they had suffered. He drew attention to the isolation and additional suffering inflicted on the Palestinian people as a result of the war on Gaza and expressed condemnation regarding the restrictions on access for humanitarian aid, the destruction of essential infrastructure and homes and the loss of civilian lives in Gaza.

78. The situation in Gaza was one of unprecedented deprivation, and much more needed to be done to provide UNRWA with the resources that it needed to deliver relief and essential services to the population. He called on the international community and donors to support the Agency in that regard and to compel Israel to abide by international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law. He expressed appreciation to host countries and States that made contributions to the Agency and called for additional contributions and the fulfilment of existing funding pledges.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.